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Dr. Joshua Lederberg  
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Dear Josh:

Thanks for your note. I guess I could argue on either side of the issue of whether ABM's were good or bad for us and in the end, it all boils down to the question of what one thinks the reactions on the other side would be to a deployment either by the U.S. or the U.S.S.R. My best judgment is that if the U.S.S.R. were found to be deploying an ABM system, we would not only deploy one of our own, but we would immediately begin to buy lots more ballistic missiles and to make penetration aids in order to overcome the ABM system. As always, we would think that the Soviet ABM system was a hell of a lot better than it was. We would frighten ourselves into buying many more ballistic missiles than we needed; the Soviet Union would probably do the same thing, and so I would suspect that the uncertainties and fear would generate a violent new cycle of the arms race.

In addition, it would be necessary to have a major fallout shelter program as an adjunct to an ABM system to make it really effective. As I recall our efforts to sell fallout shelters to the American public, I am really skeptical about the willingness of the country to accept them. We are quite prepared to buy protection through military systems that only cost money, but we are not prepared to accept any disorientation or physical inconvenience for that protection. I also find it hard to believe that one could deploy a system primarily for protection against Chinese missiles because the state of mutual confidence between the United States and the Soviet Union is not such that the Soviet Union could really accept a defensive system which appeared to be effective against the Soviet force even if we said over and over that it was really meant to protect us from the Chinese, and they needn't worry about it.

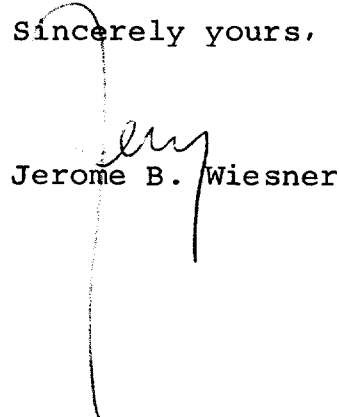
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I also have severe doubts about how effective a system of this kind could be in the face of decoys and other counter-measures which easily could be taken, particularly when one considers the state of maintenance and readiness that we are likely to have in the system after a year or two of standby.

On the other side of the coin, it would be very nice, as you point out, to have such a system to protect against accidental firing of rockets, or in the event of major disarmament agreements, to protect against a few clandestine rockets which are the bugaboo today of any major arms reduction scheme. It is hard to believe that we could persuade the nation to spend twenty billion dollars in order to make it possible to get rid of our ballistic missile force. In any event, these are complicated problems for which technical and political interactions are so important that they cannot really be separated and in which the intent of a decision is almost as important as the decision itself.

With very best regards,

Sincerely yours,



Jerome B. Wiesner